

# *Sketch*

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## The Affair

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## The Affair

by Susan Faber

*English and Speech, Sr.*

JOSEPHINE fought an impulse to check the clock again and concentrated instead on finishing the letter she was typing. Several minutes ticked by; she didn't notice the constant hum of office noises — the clacking of typewriter keys, light gossip passing between two clerks, the heavy slam of a file drawer.

"Oh darn!" she muttered as her fingers slipped in an unwanted word. That was the third mistake on the page — one too many for Mr. Burke's approval and acceptance. She yanked the paper from the typewriter and plopped back in her seat. She felt too keyed up to do a good job on the letter; it could be finished in the morning.

She swiveled her chair around to face the desk behind her. "Edna, why don't you come to the party anyway? Bill can wait a little extra for his dinner tonight."

The brown and gray speckled head wagged gently as the small, pleasantly-lined face lifted and smiled back at Josephine.

"Now, Josie, that's the fifth time you've asked me today. I've got three ravenous kids plus a husband who expects

dinner on time. But you go, and then tell me tomorrow what it was like. I've never gone to one of the office cocktail parties."

"I just thought you might enjoy going for once. They're kind of fun."

"Listen, you're so excited about it, why don't you leave now and get ready. It's early, but no one will notice. And then you'll have plenty of time."

"You think I should?" She glanced at the clock. "It is early, but maybe this time. . . ." Josephine scooted the chair back, cleaned her desk top of all papers and folders, and shoved them in a drawer. She pulled her purse from another drawer and stood up to leave.

" 'Bye, Edna."

"Have a good time. And, uh, Josie, give him your best technique," she added with a grin.

"Give who what?"

"Come on now, don't play innocent. Mr. B's introducing the new assistant at the party as you well know. And he's supposed to be a real catch and a *bachelor!*" She emphasized the last word.

"Yes, and he's probably twenty years younger than me. Anyway, 'bye for now."

Josephine knew that her face was flushed as she flounced toward the ladies' lounge. Her high heeled pumps clicked loudly on the tile floor of the lounge as she went to the mirror.

A new make-up job is definitely needed, she thought as she critically checked her face. Burrowing through the huge black purse, she found the several little tubes and bottles and compacts she wanted and spread them out before her.

No bloom of youth remained in her face, and the wrinkles around her eyes and mouth were decided ones, but, she thought happily, it wasn't a *bad* face. She applied extra eye-liner and rouge and deepened her Cupid's bow with the red lipstick to give herself a dramatic look for the evening.

I wonder what he'll be like, she thought. Maybe not so young. After all, he *is* an assistant. He can't be right out of college and have a job like that. Maybe he'll be gray at the

temples like Cary Grant. And forty-ish . . . and maybe he'll like mature women.

She suddenly blushed again.

Her make-up applied, she gave her nose a last pat with the powder puff and adjusted her dress. It was a black shantung shirtwaist, slightly open at the neck, with a belted waist and full skirt. She gazed sideways in the mirror. Not too bad a figure for a woman of her years — except maybe the hips. Well, after all, she wasn't old — just thirty-nine. Her pumps were black patent leather, and new for the occasion. Around her neck hung an antique silver necklace heavy with garnets, and she had dangling garnet earrings to match. She had dressed especially for the party!

Wish Edna had come with me, she thought. The married ones hardly ever come to these parties. Just the young girls who are too young to drink anyway. She sniffed indignantly.

A group of the young secretaries bounced in then, laughing and talking among themselves. Josephine ignored them but listened intently to the snatches of conversation.

"I've already met him. Not that much if you want my opinion."

"I thought he was just darling. You're just saying that because you're married."

"I *like* older men."

Josephine's heart lurched a bit. How old, she wondered. She replaced the wisps of dark brown hair that had fallen from the tight bun on the back of her head and gathered up her belongings. The door closed behind her, shutting off the gay, somehow irritating, chatter of the girls.

She took the elevator down two flights and stepped off. Poking her head into the large conference room where the party was to be held, she observed a few people already there, and she walked shyly in. She noticed no new faces.

The party got off to a fast start, and soon the room was full of laughing, chattering people who carried a drink in one hand and waved a cigarette in the other. Josephine smiled at everyone and said a few words to the people she knew best about what a nice party it was. She kept her empty hands clasped.

Suddenly Mr. Burke was at her side booming into her ear, "Josie, you haven't met David, have you?"

Josephine turned slowly and looked. The new assistant! But . . . he was absolutely beautiful! Handsome and well set and dark curly hair . . . and thirty-five at the youngest — that wasn't too young. Josie's mind raced.

"Miss Josephine Merritt, Mr. David Cummings. Our new assistant, Josie."

Josephine couldn't say a word, but the man took her hand gently yet firmly and looked deeply into her eyes as he said, "I'm *very* pleased to meet you, Miss Merritt."

She only nodded.

"Josie," Mr. Burke interjected in a rushed tone, "would you mind manning the punch bowl, as a personal favor? I have to make more introductions."

She nodded again absently as the two men walked off. He was the most beautiful man in the world . . . and the way he'd looked at her! She floated over to the punch bowl, trying to keep her eyes on him. He was just her type. The other single men she'd met at parties had seemed distant and uninterested. They hadn't been her type at all. And David was such a beautiful name — it always had been one of her favorites.

She poured punch in a daze and didn't notice that few people even bothered to talk to her. And when a small group across the room laughed loudly and looked toward her and her ears caught the phrase "old maid chaperon," she only vaguely wondered about whom they were discussing.

The hour passed too swiftly. David smiled at her twice when he caught her watching him. She was in ecstasy! She dreamed of the future they could have together, of the security of a home. He cared something for her, that was important — she knew by the way he'd looked at her, so deep and intense and personal. And those smiles — meant just for her.

Josephine was disappointed when the party was over and David slipped out without saying good-bye. But tomorrow — yes, tomorrow — she'd see him again. She wouldn't let him know that she knew how he felt about her. He would have

to make the first move. They'd play the game all the way.

She found her black cloth coat and purse and walked down the flight of steps to the ground floor. Everything was quiet and sterile-looking in the evening gloom. Ben, the janitor, leaned on his mop and tipped his cap at her.

"G'night, Miss Merritt, see ya tomorrow."

She smiled at him and walked out the door.

Tomorrow would be a beautiful day.



## The Runner

*by Robert Caldwell*

*Chemistry, Jr.*

THE GARDENER'S late afternoon nonchalance had let that single strand of grass escape the whirling, slashing fate of its neighbors. The runner's hand, which now caressed the solitary blade of grass, did so with indifference, until, with a vicious jerk, the hand thrust it in his mouth.

In response to the shrill note of a whistle, the runner sat up and spat the mangled remains on the ground. The whistle, which might have called children indoors from recess, caused the runner's heart to surge in awful harmony with his twisting stomach. The runner's entrails knew, perhaps even better than he did, that in fifteen minutes they were to be tortured over the surrounding terrain.